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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, September 7, 2006

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Published September 7, 2006

More arrests possible in Holland case

Ricky's dad said his in-laws were aware of abuse

By Stacey Range
Lansing State Journal

What's next

- Today: Dr. Elaine Pomeranz, a child abuse expert and medical director of the University of Michigan Hospital's child protection team, will testify at a final pretrial hearing.
- Monday: Lisa Holland's trial is scheduled to begin in Ingham County Circuit Court.

More people could be charged in connection with 7-year-old Ricky Holland's July 2005 murder and subsequent cover-up.

Ingham County Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency wouldn't say Wednesday who his office is looking at, but said he is looking.

"There is an ongoing investigation into others who may have been involved in aspects of this case," Ferency said.

As part of a plea agreement made Tuesday, Tim Holland, Ricky's adoptive father, must testify against any other people charged in relation to the boy's death.

Tim Holland, who pleaded guilty to second-degree murder, also must testify against his wife, Lisa Holland, who he has said killed Ricky on July 1, 2005. She says her husband killed Ricky. Her trial on charges of first-degree murder and child abuse begins Monday.

In chilling testimony Tuesday, Tim Holland detailed what he called years of physical and mental abuse of Ricky.

He described incidents involving both his wife and her parents.

Holland stated under oath that his wife told him she and her father handcuffed Ricky to a bed after he tried to run away, and that after Ricky ran away another time, her father "tackled" Ricky, brought him home and made him stand naked in the TV room as his punishment.

Tim Holland also said his father-in-law was at the house when he came home to find Lisa Holland had duct-taped Ricky's head to a refrigerator.

Tim Holland also told the court that Lisa's mother counseled her to take another son out of school to avoid questions about that child.

Ferency acknowledged the seriousness of Tim Holland's statements about his wife's parents, who have not been charged.

"We may decide to do something, we may not depending on the quality of the evidence," Ferency said.

In other action Wednesday, Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield approved a motion for Mike Nichols to be appointed as counsel to Lisa Holland, who the court last month declared indigent. The move essentially means Nichols now will be paid by the county instead of Lisa Holland.

Despite the ruling, Manderfield said she wanted to review Nichols' billings before the county would reimburse his costs. "This is not an open book as far as billing," she told him.

On the prosecution's side, Ferency got approval Wednesday to add eight people to his witness list, including Tim Holland, some school officials from Jackson and Williamston, and a social worker.

The Hollands, who took in Ricky as a foster child when he was 3 years old and adopted him in 2003, moved from Jackson to Williamston two months before they reported Ricky missing on July 2, 2005. His disappearance launched a massive communitywide manhunt.

Contact Stacey Range at 377-1157 or srange@lsj.com.

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from **The Detroit News**

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September 7, 2006

Legislation package aims to better protect children

Ombudsman would answer to lawmakers under proposal that follows death of Ricky, 7.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

Gov. Jennifer Granholm would be stripped of control over the state children's ombudsman under legislation to be introduced in Lansing today by a legislative committee investigating the death of 7-year-old Ricky Holland.

The first wave of what lawmakers promise will be a sweeping overhaul of child welfare, the seven bills would restructure accountability for the Department of Human Services while tightening reporting and monitoring of child abuse by state workers and law enforcement.

"Let's be proactive, and maybe we can prevent another Ricky Holland case," said Attorney General Mike Cox, who supports the bills to be introduced by members of the House Special Committee on Child Protection formed after the adopted boy was found dead in January. His father pleaded guilty to second-degree murder Tuesday; his mother is charged with murder in the killing.

"If we were to follow these signals earlier on, we could shape up some of these families so less children would be hurt and less would go into foster care," Cox said.

The bills proposed by the committee, led by state Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, would:

Require police to report to Children's Protective Services when they handle domestic violence complaints at homes where children live and force state workers to investigate.

Force the state to monitor families found to be at even low to moderate risk of harming children.

Keep the names of potential or suspected abusers in a central database, even if they pose a low risk. The current one only tracks those who are at high risk of abuse.

Make the children's ombudsman answer to the Legislature rather than the governor. The current ombudsman, Verlie Ruffin, has refused to release files on the Ricky Holland case that lawmakers requested for their investigation.

"The trouble stems from even the appearance that (the ombudsman) may not be independent, because they're reviewing who they report to," Law said. "I do have my concerns regarding the independence of their investigations."

Ruffin didn't return calls for comment Wednesday.

Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd said the current system represents a compromise between the governor's office and the Legislature. The governor makes the appointment, but the state Senate has to approve it.

"To move (the Office of the Children's Ombudsman) to the responsibility solely of the Legislature really would politicize it," Boyd said. "There would be a temptation by lawmakers to play politics in an election year, just as they are doing now."

"We think the system we have in place now really does work"

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Published September 7, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Our towns - news from our local communities

LANSING

Child abuse prevention programs get new funding

The Michigan Children's Trust Fund Board of Directors (CTF) recently awarded \$547,536 in new funding to 18 local child abuse prevention projects across the state.

"These programs protect children and strengthen parents' skills," CTF Executive Director Richard Bearup said in a statement.

Among the recipients of the CTF's grants is Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Greater Lansing, which received \$34,666. The program, serving families in Ingham, Eaton, Clinton, Shiawassee and Ionia counties, will be able to mentor an additional 30 families and children through its Family Mentoring Network.

The CTF provides grants for public education, training and technical assistance, and funds a network of local, community-based child abuse prevention programs across the state. For more information about the CTF, visit www.michigan.gov/ctf. For more information about Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Greater Lansing, visit www.bigimpactmidmi.com.



Muskegon Chronicle

Two men charged with child-sex crimes

Thursday, September 07, 2006

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

Two Muskegon-area men were arraigned Friday in 60th District Court on sex-related charges.

Charles Mychal Houck, 43, of 7321 White, Lot 50, is charged with third-degree criminal sexual conduct with a boy between the ages of 13 and 15.

Houck was a friend of the victim's family, according to the Muskegon County Sheriff's Department. The sex allegation was reported in connection with an unrelated case deputies were investigating in early July.

Visiting Judge Robert Benson set bail at \$10,000 cash or surety, and preliminary examination for Sept. 14. If bond is posted, Houck is to have no contact with the boy or his residence.

Ronald Alfnejd, 45, of 1984 W. Sherman, is charged with accosting a child for immoral purposes.

Norton Shores police said he allegedly masturbated in front of a young boy, said that he was bisexual from being in prison and asked the child if he wanted to have sex. The incident was reported Aug. 31 and occurred in woods behind Plumb's, 1663 W. Sherman. Police said the child ran away from him.

Court records show Alfnejd has a 1989 conviction for second-degree criminal sexual conduct in Oceana County. Police said he served the maximum time for that offense and was released in 2004.

Because of that conviction and a 1984 drug-related conviction, Alfnejd faces a third-offense habitual offender count, which could enhance any prison sentence he receives if he is convicted of the current offense.

Judge Benson set bail at \$25,000 cash or surety and preliminary examination for Sept. 14.

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Plea made in sex case

Thursday, September 07, 2006

CEDAR SPRINGS -- A man who served as a foster parent, paramedic and volunteer firefighter is jailed awaiting sentencing after he pleaded no contest to second-degree sexual assault and furnishing alcohol to a minor. Matthew D. Kendall, 33, of Nelson Township, entered the pleas Tuesday in Kent County Circuit Court as his trial was to begin. He faces up to 15 years in prison. Kendall worked for Cedar Springs Fire Department and Montcalm County Advance Life Support Ambulance. Police said the victim was a minor living at his home under his guardianship while the victim's mother received medical treatment.

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WXYZ

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Sex Offenders Arrested for Failing to Update Address

By Bill Proctor

Web produced by Sarah Morgan

September 7, 2006



29-year-old Dwayne Michael Carl was arrested for failing to register his new address.

Thursday, authorities in Wayne County rounded up sex offenders who failed to register their new addresses in hopes of keeping kids safe as they start school.

Despite a list of excuses, 29-year-old Dwayne Michael Carl was headed to jail after failing to register his new address. He served a year in jail for assaulting a 13-year-old girl and now he faces 4 years in prison for not registering his new address.

In Westland alone, police know of 31 offenders who moved away from the place they registered as home.

Westland Police Chief Daniel Pfannes said, "10 of them have had sex with children under the age of 15-years-old and have failed to comply with the conditions that have been placed upon them."

Assistant County Prosecutor Lora Weingarden suggested parents look on the sex offender registry to determine whether a new neighbor or someone with access to their child is a sex offender.

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Grants to aid three free health clinics that serve uninsured

Thursday, September 7, 2006

By Chris Meehan

cmeehan@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8412

Three health clinics in southwestern Michigan that offer free services will share grants totaling \$82,500, officials from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan have announced.

The clinics are among 31 statewide receiving grants totaling \$1 million from the health-care insurer.

The grants are intended to help meet the needs of the uninsured who use free health clinics. The uninsured total an estimated 1.1 million statewide.

In this area, Kalamazoo's First Presbyterian Church Health Clinic, 2918 Portage Road, received a grant of \$25,000; the Three Rivers-Riverside Health Clinic, 207 E. Michigan Ave., was awarded \$27,500; and the Coldwater-Presbyterian Health Clinic of Branch County, 52 Marshall St., was given \$30,000.

“We do see what is happening in terms of health-care costs. It is getting harder and harder for employers to pay for coverage for their employees,” said Kevin Seitz, president and CEO of Blue Care Network, a subsidiary of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan.

“We have witnessed gradually in many Michigan communities a growing free-clinic movement. Predominately, sets of health-care practitioners are giving of themselves to provide care in these clinics.”

The grant program began in 2005 to help clinics continue operations and purchase everything from medications to office supplies.

“These clinics are the absolute last safety net,” Seitz said. “Our grants go to help support the infrastructure that allows these free clinics to function.”

The First Presbyterian Church Health Clinic used its 2005 grant to purchase new office equipment, supplies for nursing assessments and an electrocardiograph machine.

Its new \$25,000 grant, Seitz said, will help the clinic implement a “Steps to Better Health” outreach program to improve disease-prevention awareness and early disease detection. Grant money also will help teach patients to navigate the health-care system.

The clinic sees an average of 270 patients a month and receives 150 calls per week, said Jane Zwiers, the clinic's executive director.

The clinic in Coldwater used its 2005 grant to treat qualified county residents for high blood pressure and diabetes, purchase medication and supplies, and provide dental and hearing programs.

“Its new \$30,000 funding will provide the uninsured in Branch County with hearing aids and primary dental services. It also will provide diabetic patients with medication and supplies, and develop education programs to teach them how to control their diabetes and high blood pressure,” according to a press release.

The Three Rivers-Riverside Health Clinic will use its \$27,500 grant “to purchase pharmacy software to improve clinic efficiency, along with office furniture and high-demand medical supplies,” officials said.

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Schools will be hub for health program

Thursday, September 07, 2006

By Dave Murray

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Kent County schools are banding together with social service agencies to create what educators call a sweeping infusion of physical and mental health help for students and their families.

The plan, called the Kent School Services Network, starts this week as a pilot program in six Grand Rapids schools as well as buildings in Comstock Park and Godfrey Lee.

Educators said the idea is to help students with social and physical problems and eliminate barriers to success in the classroom.

"A lot of this comes from the idea helping to fulfill the mission of No Child Left Behind, but the truth is that it's just the right thing to do," Comstock Park Superintendent Dwight Anderson said.

"If children are not in school, they're not going to learn. And once they start that slippery slope, it becomes easier to miss and fall further and further behind. The goal is to get to the root of the problem and find why the student is missing in the first place and get those families the help they need."

The program places three staff members in each of the pilot buildings: a Spectrum Health nurse, a Human Services Department financial independence worker and a "resource connector" skilled at matching problems with the agencies available to help.

The partnership, more than two years in the making, is planned to be announced today at Alger Middle School in Grand Rapids.

Agencies are contributing their own money, staff and equipment to the partnership, and the Grand Rapids Community Foundation has provided a \$486,000 grant. The Children's Aid Society of New York, one of the nation's largest child welfare agencies, is providing advice.

"This is a perfect example of community agencies coming together," Grand Rapids Superintendent Bernard Taylor said. "We're bringing the services closer to the children and their families, and turning the schools into a kind of hub for the community."

Matthew Van Zetten, who heads the Kent County Family and Children's Coordinating Council, said the agencies realized that some families had trouble either recognizing they need help or didn't know how to seek assistance. But having staff in the buildings will help spot problems more quickly.

"The idea is to remove the barriers," he said. "For some families, that barrier is transportation, and the schools are places they can get to. For others, it's the knowledge who is out there to help them."

Eight schools were selected for the first round, and if successful the program could spread around the county.

Pine Island Elementary in Comstock Park and Godfrey Lee Early Childhood Center are intended to serve as districtwide hubs. Grand Rapids will offer the programs at Alger, Burton Elementary-Middle School, Coit Creative Arts Academy, Harrison Park Elementary-Middle School, Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Academy and Sibley Elementary.

The Grand Rapids buildings are either new, recently renovated or are being renovated this year and designed to include specialized rooms for social service workers and nurses.

The program builds on full-service health centers operating in the city's high schools.

Send e-mail to the author: dmurray@grpress.com

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Article published Sep 7, 2006

EDITORIAL

State plan to boost Medicaid reimbursement makes sense

Medicaid is supposed to help pay for health care for low-income families. But with Medicaid reimbursement falling far below the actual costs incurred, many physicians limit the number of Medicaid patients they see, or simply refuse Medicaid patients altogether.

That often means that poor people fail to get prompt medical attention and often end up in hospital emergency rooms with conditions far worse - and more expensive to treat - than if they had been seen sooner.

So we think there is merit to a plan being developed as part of the state budget negotiations for 2007 that would increase Medicaid payments to doctors by about 30 percent for wellness checks and physical examinations for children and adults covered by Medicaid.

Not only would the plan help more Medicaid recipients to stay healthy by catching any problems early, but increased payments might be an incentive for more health-care providers to accept Medicaid patients.

The plan would cost an estimated \$16.6 million, but state officials say it would be covered by cuts elsewhere in the Medicaid budget.

Receiving prompt medical attention often can help patients get well more quickly, as well as avoid the expense of treating more complicated medical problems that may result from an untreated condition. That is why most health-care providers and insurers encourage wellness checks and preventive measures.

But we also realize that the 30 percent increase in Medicaid reimbursements might not be enough to encourage a lot of physicians to conduct wellness checks and medical exams for Medicaid patients. Under the state plan, Medicaid's payment for a head-to-toe physical exam for new patients 1 to 4 years old would rise from the current \$59 to \$77. But that still is well below the \$129 paid by a private insurer such as Blue Cross/Blue Shield.

"It remains to be seen whether that increase will make much of a difference," Jane Zehnder-Merrell of the Michigan League for Human Services told the

Associated Press.

That is true. But we think the increased reimbursement is at least a step in the right direction in helping Medicaid families to get and stay healthy, as well as reduce the costs hospitals incur when untreated conditions lead to expensive emergency care.



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Published September 7, 2006

Medicaid: Pinched payments now mean bigger bills later for state

A Lansing State Journal editorial

A plan to boost some Medicaid payments to Michigan doctors is an obvious step in the right direction. But only a step.

Michigan's leaders, at the state and federal level, forget at our peril that health-care is a business. Make it a bad business and everyone pays more in the end.

As part of the 2007 state budget, which starts Oct. 1, Michigan would trim Medicaid spending in other areas to boost doctor payments for preventive care, such as routine physicals. Medicaid payments on such visits and procedures badly lags those made by Medicare and by private insurers.

The rationale for such payment is obvious (save money) - and shortsighted.

Doctors and other health providers have long warned about the impact of low Medicaid payments: You don't pay us, we'll look elsewhere.

Last month, the LSJ reported on a huge drop in the number of Michigan doctors who would even accept Medicaid patients. A survey by the Michigan State Medical Society found that one in three doctors were turning away Medicaid recipients.

This makes it harder to get preventive care, which leads to small health issues becoming big ones; problems that end up being treated in hospital emergency rooms at much higher spending rates.

In other words, Michigan is saving money now to spend more later.

Of course, this limited payment plan isn't likely to reverse the numbers on doctor participation in Medicaid. But if Michigan doesn't start considering the business side of health, the state will find its health policy in the emergency room, too.

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Published September 7, 2006

Grant may lead to free dental clinic

Medical center for uninsured seeking dentists

By Christine Rook
Lansing State Journal

Some of mid-Michigan's uninsured are about \$20,000 closer to getting access to free dental care.

Now they just need volunteer dentists.

Care Free Medical has won a grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network to set up a free dental clinic for residents without insurance.

"It's virtually impossible to get them dental care," said Dr. Barry Saltman, president and medical director of Care Free's locations in Lansing and Mason.

In all, Blue Cross awarded \$45,000 to Care Free, which has been providing health care to the uninsured since July 2004. Most of the grant money will allow the nonprofit medical centers to offer more after-hours care.

About \$20,000 will help turn two rooms at the South Pennsylvania Avenue site into dental suites.

Blue Cross today is formally announcing the grants, which are part of \$1 million in donations it is making to 30 free clinics statewide.

The challenge now, Saltman said, is finding dentists to volunteer at the Pennsylvania site.

"I can't do dental care," the doctor said. "You have to have a dentist."

Michigan Dental Association officials vowed Wednesday to help Saltman find the people he needs.

To help

Care Free Medical is currently looking for licensed dentists willing to donate a few hours a week to treat the needy. Learn more by calling the Lansing office at 887-5922.

Need free care?

- Call Care Free Medical's Mason site at 244-0120.
- Call the Lansing office at 887-5922.

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"I know a lot of local dentists," said Tom Kochheiser, who served on Blue Cross' grant-selection committee and voted to give money to Care Free. "We would really encourage them to participate."

Care Free Medical treats more than 3,000 patients a month at its two sites, Saltman said.

Patients sometimes show up with abscesses in their teeth, which doctors can only treat with antibiotics and pain medication. Often these patients then turn to hospital emergency rooms, where they are given more pain medication and told to call a dentist.

Blue Cross will begin making its \$1 million in grant money available in the next month. It is the second year in a row the non-profit has donated \$1 million for care of the needy. Officials said they hope to do the same in 2007.

"This is the last line for people who don't have care or don't have access to insurance," said Kevin Seitz, senior vice president with Blue Cross.

Contact Christine Rook at 377-1261 or clrook@lsj.com.

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Published: September 07. 2006 3:00AM

WAYNE COUNTY

NEWS IN A MINUTE: Wayne County

September 7, 2006

COUNTY-WIDE: **County's plan for mental health agency gets boost**

The state Senate voted Wednesday to let the Wayne County Commission appoint all 12 members of the board that oversees the Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency, a move that would end the practice of having six members each appointed by the county executive and Detroit mayor.

The move comes as the county considers whether to cede control of the agency to an independent authority as a way of improving services to the 40,000 patients who use the system. County Executive Robert Ficano and the commission have asked that the state allow the county to appoint the full board as a condition for proceeding with an authority. The bill now goes to the state House for consideration.



THE BAY CITY TIMES

Teens charged in baseball bat attack against woman

Thursday, September 07, 2006

By **TOM GILCHRIST**

TIMES WRITER

CLARE - Police claim a 15-year-old Clare boy and a Farwell teenager tried to rob the Clare boy's mother on Aug. 21, pulling Halloween masks over their heads and beating the woman with baseball bats.

Clare County prosecutors charged Joshua Parobek as an adult on Tuesday, accusing him of assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder. Prosecutors also accuse the boy of armed robbery, safebreaking and conspiracy to assault with intent to rob while armed.

Officers with the Clare Police Department said Parobek and 19-year-old Caleb Hicks of Farwell both donned Halloween masks and entered the home of 46-year-old Lori Parobek to try to steal money.

When Lori Parobek came home around 8 p.m., police said the teens attacked her with baseball bats in her basement, striking her repeatedly before running from the house along Forest Street on Clare's northeast side.

Prosecutors arraigned Hicks on the same criminal charges a number of days ago, police said.

Lori Parobek survived the assault after receiving treatment at a hospital.

"She had a lot of bruises, and some broken fingers - defensive wounds," said Detective Barry Babcock of the Clare Police Department.

One of the suspects wore an alien mask over his head, and the other appeared as a troll, Babcock said.

Authorities in 80th District Court set bond at \$75,000 cash for Joshua Parobek, held in a juvenile-detention facility this morning, according to Clare Police Chief Dwayne Miedzianowski.

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Wednesday, September 06, 2006

Detroit News letters to the editor

Reform welfare so it cares

Contrary to the Aug. 25 editorial "Let's end traditional welfare in Michigan," welfare reform in Michigan has not been a success. The only reason that the number of welfare recipients has plummeted is because a large percentage of people in this state are not considered eligible for benefits, thanks to former Gov. John Engler. We need a government that cares about the needs of the people.

Mary Young

Canton Township



Writer right on welfare abuse

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

GRAND BLANC

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, September 07, 2006

JOURNAL READER

To those people offended by the remarks made by a cashier regarding Bridge Cards, I would like to say that I agree with some of the comments made by Ms. Weaver ["Welfare Cadillac? Grocery store cashier says she's seen it all," by Christina M. Weaver, If You Ask Me, Aug. 13].

Probably, the cashier did not tell The Flint Journal that all people on welfare abuse the system. And, I am sure we all know that not all welfare recipients drive fancy cars. But there is abuse in the system, and I'm certain that even Sharon Wright, the caseworker who wrote ["Guest writer status is too much," Your Views, Aug. 27], is aware of this.

The cashier made valid points when she mentioned that the cards should not be used to order expensive specialty cakes. Whatever happened to a \$2 cake mix? If welfare recipients are allowed to order specialty cakes and buy high-priced items, what are their children eating the rest of the month? If the WIC program can regulate which items are purchased, why can't the Bridge Card program do the same? Then, at least we would know that the children of welfare recipients are eating properly. Ms. Weaver gave some ideas that sound fair to me on how to correct the program.

Donna Freestone

Grand Blanc

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THE BAY CITY TIMES

An Invisible Issue

Thursday, September 07, 2006

By RYAN J. STANTON

TIMES WRITER

You may say there's not a homeless problem in Bay County, but try telling that to Kim Harris.

The 24-year-old Bay Cityan found her life taking a turn for the worse earlier this summer, after she lost her job as an in-home aide.

Struggling to pay bills or find other work, Harris was evicted from her home. Suddenly, she and her 3-year-old daughter, Jaylin, seemed to have nowhere to turn.

On July 31, the mother and daughter sought shelter at the Good Samaritan Rescue Mission, a homeless shelter that opened last year at 713 Ninth St.

"They let me come in, gave me and my daughter a place to stay," Harris said.

The mission also helped Harris land a new job at a local Tim Hortons restaurant. She's moving to an apartment on Henry Street this week.

Harris and her daughter are among more than 500 women and children who've found shelter at Good Samaritan since it opened, a statistic community leaders say points to a problem largely invisible to most residents.

A new plan, put together by community leaders and mandated by the state, addresses the problem and puts into motion ways to handle the growing need for affordable housing in Bay County.

Forming a plan of attack

Community leaders have spent the last few months crafting a 10-year plan to end homelessness in Bay County, while similar efforts have caught on across the state and country.

Bay County's Continuum of Care Committee, a collective body of nearly 30 nonprofit agencies, has met in recent months to pinpoint and diagnose the problem locally.

What's resulted is a 42-page draft plan submitted last week to the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, showing how the community can attack the problem.

"Every single county in the Michigan is doing one of these plans and the state's really been helping us along," said Erin Dunkle, chairwoman of the committee and community services director for the local Red Cross chapter in Bay City.

Dunkle says a final plan will be completed by Oct. 15. Continuum of Care, like similar groups in other counties, received a \$10,000 stipend from the state toward the effort.

"I think we can make a huge impact," Dunkle said. "We're always going to have people who are homeless, it's always going to occur, but I think we can drastically reduce the numbers."

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development recently mandated the tracking of homeless populations within counties, with numbers now kept in a database.

A count from Jan. 1 to June 30 shows a total of 282 homeless people served by agencies in Bay County, compared to 26,405 statewide.

It's the first time the county has had such concrete numbers to measure the homeless population, Dunkle notes, though the figures don't include Cornerstone Mission or the Women's Center.

A January 2005 point-in-time count indicated that 95 Bay County men, women and children are served by homeless service organizations here every day.

"A lot of times we hear, 'There's not a homeless problem,' because it's not seen - it's not a visible problem to a majority of Bay County residents," said Dunkle, who has worked with homeless families and individuals in the area for five years.

Capt. Mike Myers, head of the Salvation Army in Bay City, launched a soup kitchen in July that serves meals on Mondays and Wednesdays. In its first month, the kitchen served 176 men, women and children.

"I'm going to suspect probably several in that number were homeless," Myers said. "I believe Bay County, like many counties, does have a homeless problem."

A lingering problem

Dorothy Giffel, director of Cornerstone Mission, says her shelter has served close to 5,000 homeless people in the last 14 years. Those include men, women and children, many of whom she considers victims of a stagnant economy.

Cornerstone caters to people out of work, though many with jobs have been knocking on Giffel's door lately.

"Most jobs don't pay enough and they don't get enough hours. It's a problem," says Giffel, who reluctantly had to turn those people away.

According to Continuum of Care's 10-year plan, homeless families and individuals in Bay County are typically the working poor - people struggling with low wages or job loss.

Declining wages have put housing out of reach for many workers, as more than minimum wage is required to afford a one- or two-bedroom apartment, according to the plan.

"A big part of it is the economy," Dunkle said. "People are working full-time, but minimum wage just doesn't cut it. A large portion of the clients we see are working."

Dunkle says Bay County has a serious shortage of affordable housing options, and the need for permanent supportive housing has not been adequately addressed.

The 10-year plan acknowledges several flaws of the current shelter system, noting that some people receive inconsistent or insufficient services. As a result, some spend longer than necessary in a shelter or aren't served at all.

The plan also sheds light on the disparity between income levels and the cost of living here. Without plans to create more affordable housing in the county, more people will be at risk of becoming homeless.

"Mostly, it's the cost of living that's rough on a low-income family," Dunkle says.

Working on the problem

Community leaders say single homeless men struggle to find help in Bay County, but that's starting to change.

Good Samaritan opened a two-bedroom wing this week for single fathers and intact families, those families with both a mom and dad. Until now, the shelter's lone 32-bed wing catered only to women and children.

Mission director Dan Streeter said a new 20-bed wing for single men will open in the future.

Nearly \$1 million in renovations so far have created the women's wing, dining room, chapel area, kitchen, play area and library. An outside playscape is on the way.

Streeter said the shelter is averaging about 15 people per night, though it's housed up to 29 at once.

"The numbers are showing it has been a definite need," he said. "The more people get behind us, the more we can get behind those in need."

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By JASON V

Agency developing plan to combat homelessness

A local agency is developing a plan to address homelessness in Northeast Michigan while ensuring residents are aware of its existence.

The Northeast Michigan Community Services Agency — in conjunction with local entities — is drafting a 10-year plan to end area homelessness.

Carol Shafto, planning and evaluation director for NEMCSA, said homelessness is prevalent throughout the region, although it's not always visible.

"In my opinion, there is a big problem in Northeast Michigan, but it's disguised as many different things," she said.

Shafto said the stereotypical picture of the single man huddled over a burning barrel isn't applicable to the region. In fact, she said the face of homelessness is anyone who doesn't have true home.

"That typical picture of urban homelessness is not true here," she said. "There are many more families who are homeless than in the past."

Local governmental agencies have been approving resolutions supporting the initiative to end homelessness. In total, 18 resolutions have been sent to entities throughout the five-county consortium.

"We're going to be able to say every unit of government within the five counties is aware of the (homelessness) plan," Shafto said.

However, the resolution doesn't require monetary contributions from the governmental entities.

Shafto said the local governmental initiative is more about creating awareness.

The local effort is part of a national initiative.

In 2002, President George W. Bush introduced a 10-year plan to end homelessness, which was later endorsed by the National Association of Counties and United States Conference of Mayors.

Shafto said Michigan will become the first state to have plans initiated in all 83 counties. Each county will have a plan.

"This is a big deal," she said.

The effort is being spearheaded by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority and Michigan Department of Human Services.

Locally, the plan to end homelessness consists of five counties: Alcona, Alpena, Iosco, Montmorency and Presque Isle.

In May, a local 10-year advisory board entered into a contract with NEMCSA for Shafto to facilitate the planning process and prepare written documents.

Shafto has been working with the Human Services Coordinating Councils in the surrounding area to assist with the planning process.

Focus groups also have been formed to discuss several issues of homelessness. Interviews have been conducted with area agencies, such as law enforcement, mental health and public schools. In addition, individuals who reside or resided in homeless and domestic violence shelters, including other homeless situations, have been questioned.

Shafto said the background will help establish the scope of homelessness in northeast Michigan. She said the plan isn't due until Oct. 15.

Prior to the date, Shafto will speak to regional governmental bodies to promote awareness.

On Oct. 24-25, MHDA and MDHS will sponsor an event at the Lansing Center, called "The Campaign to End Homelessness — Homelessness Summit," to celebrate the completion of the initial planning. The event will include federal, state and local officials, as well as national and local experts to facilitate working sessions.

"Obviously, we know we're not going to end homelessness," Shafto said. "Our goal is to try to prevent recurring homelessness and try to address the homelessness we do have locally."

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Published September 6, 2006

Health job: Bernero, Granholm can involve faith offices on health plans

Learn more

- Information on the Ingham Health Plan is available at www.communityhealthplans.org/IHP_default.htm.

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Mayor Virg Bernero and Gov. Jennifer Granholm seem to need some work for their faith-based initiatives, judging by last week's LSJ report on how unfocused these offices are.

Here's an idea: Help connect people in need with Michigan's 26 county health plans.

The Detroit News reported today of problems in Wayne County, where "thousands miss out on cheap county health care" because the people who could use available services don't know about it.

Back in Lansing, the Ingham Health Plan is about to start its ninth year with plenty to crow about (more than 14,000 people enrolled in its program to provide health coverage to working citizens) - and confronting the same challenge: Connecting people to programs.

Laura Peterson, lead staffer for the plan, detailed a humorous and illustrative story:

A business had been contacted about the Health Plan's County Advantage program, which offers insurance to workers - with the plan, the employee and the employer all paying a share. The business declined (more on that later).

In a standard follow-up, the business was sent material about Plan B, which provides health coverage to working, but uninsured people.

The business owner wrote back, saying he couldn't believe the Plan B material was accurate because "it was too good to be true."

Plan B is good, which is why the Health Plan has averaged more than 14,000 participants in it. The program covers a big gap in U.S. health care: working people who don't qualify for traditional aid programs, but who can't otherwise purchase private insurance.

Of course, the need for Plan B is fueled, in least in part, by the inability of so many employers to

offer work-based health insurance to their workers. Peterson described the County Advantage front as "really a tough one."

Here's where these faith initiatives could come into play.

The Ingham Health Plan already works with local neighborhood groups to do awareness campaigns, even sending people door-to-door to do sign-ups. And Peterson says these groups have gone to churches to aid in such efforts.

It seems a very short step then for Granholm and Bernero to get their faith offices involved.

As detailed in last Saturday's LSJ, Bernero's new office and Granholm's well-established one are both short on specific success stories or specific strategies to aid Michigan citizens.

In light of the salaries being spent (state) or planned for (Lansing), taxpayers are entitled to much more than they are getting now.

A concerted, coordinated bid to help an existing, effective public service is a no-brainer.

Get to it.

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Published September 7, 2006
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Thursday's letters to the editor

No faith in office

Mayor Virg Bernero's establishment of a faith-based initiative (whatever that entails) funded with taxpayer money is highly questionable, both in its motivation and its incursion on the First Amendment. Whenever there are a commingle politics, city government and religion, red flags should appear.

If it is a matter of coordinating the wide variety of services available from a plethora of organizations and a writing grant proposals, we suspect city of Lansing staff would be eminently qualified to perform such duties.

There is no defensible reason to expend public money for the creation of such an initiative, complete with at least \$20,000 to be paid to a Bernero supporter, Bishop David Maxwell of Eliezer Temple.

Lansing cannot afford the creation of a new office, financially, ethically or constitutionally.

Cynthia and Anthony Beal
Lansing



Democrats push for increased jobless benefits

9/6/2006, 3:32 p.m. ET

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Democrats in the state Legislature again are pushing to extend benefits for Michigan's unemployed.

A plan detailed by House Democrats on Wednesday would extend benefits for the unemployed by 13 weeks when the state's unemployment rate is 5 percent or higher. Current law allows the unemployed to get benefits for a maximum of 26 weeks.

The Democratic proposal also would increase the weekly unemployment benefit to a maximum of \$408 from the current \$362. Future increases in benefits would be tied to inflation.

"Michigan's workers built this state, and they deserve our support and respect during tough economic times," House Democratic Leader Dianne Byrum of Onondaga said in a statement.

Senate Democrats introduced legislation with similar themes earlier this year.

Republicans hold a majority in the Legislature, including a 58-49 edge in the House. The GOP, citing the potential costs of the proposal, is not likely to advance the bills.

"The facts are, without a massive tax increase, the Democrats' plan will bankrupt the system and rip the unemployment safety net out from underneath workers," Matt Resch, a spokesman for Republican House Speaker Craig DeRoche of Novi, said in a statement.

Unemployment benefits are attracting renewed attention in part because the state has one of the nation's highest unemployment rates. Michigan's jobless rate was 7 percent in July, tied for second-highest among the states.

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Dems Plan Extends Unemployment Benefits

MIRS, September 6, 2006

House Democrats introduced a package today that would extend unemployment benefits by 13 weeks when the state's unemployment is at 5 percent or higher.

The package would also increase overall unemployment benefits to a maximum of \$408 and tie all unemployment benefit increases to the rate of inflation. Currently, maximum benefits are \$362 and the increases are not tied to inflation.

"Inflation has chipped away at the unemployment benefits we offer our workers," said Rep. Joel [SHELTROWN](#) (D-West Branch). "We must protect working families by ensuring that unemployment benefits won't be eroded by inflation in the future. Michigan workers built this state and we must stand by them."

The state's unemployment benefits last saw an increase in 2002 when they were increased from \$300 to \$362.

The package would also:

- Increase the weekly benefits allowance for a dependant from \$6 to \$20
- Increase the multiplier that determines benefits from 4.1 percent to 4.4 percent and increase the multiplier used to calculate the number of weeks a worker can receive benefits from 43 percent to 45 percent of the base-period wages
- Round unemployment benefits up to the nearest dollar; benefits are currently rounded down

"Every cent counts for our working families who are struggling to make ends meet," said Rep. Mary [DONIGAN](#) (D-Royal Oak). "We've seen CEOs turn their backs on our struggling workers as they give themselves lavish compensation packages. We must do everything within our power to stand up for our working families."



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

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Shiawassee/Livingston County DHS Announces New Approach to Foster Care ***“Family to Family” Keeps Foster Care Kids in their Schools and Communities***

September 7, 2006

OWOSSO – For many years, foster children in Michigan were often placed outside of their own communities and moved multiple times while in care. There is substantial research indicating that children in foster care who have frequent contact with their birth parents, remain in their schools, and continue their existing friendship and family networks, have a higher rate of successful reunification with their birth parents.

“Children are our most precious resource,” Governor Jennifer M. Granholm said. “It is critical that we work together to do everything we can not only to ensure the safety of our children, but also to provide them with a stable environment in which they are surrounded by adults who care about them and will help them learn and grow.”

That is why the Michigan Department of Human Services is working to implement a child welfare reform initiative called Family to Family in every county in the state. The goal of Family to Family is to place children who must be removed from their families with one permanent and stable family in the child’s own community until reunification with birth families can occur or until the child is released for adoption.

The Family to Family initiative has already been successfully implemented in several counties across the state, including Shiawassee and Livingston Counties. Family to Family is a partnership between the local Department of Human Services and the community to reduce disruption in the lives of at-risk children. This approach ensures that birth parents, foster parents and community representatives are involved in the decision-making process concerning the placement and service needs of at-risk children.

In an effort to help Shiawassee and Livingston County residents better understand the Family to Family initiative, the Shiawassee/Livingston County Department of Human Services is hosting a community forum on September 7, 2006 from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at Baker College Welcome Center, 1309 South M-52, in Owosso.

This event will feature foster parents and former foster children speaking about their experience with the child welfare system as well as parents who have been or are currently involved in the state’s child welfare system. Additionally, several Shiawassee and Livingston County community human service agencies will be present with information about the services they provide.

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“When children are placed in foster care they often do not understand what has happened and why they cannot live with their parents,” Marianne Udow, Michigan Department of Human Services director, said. “When we ask children where they want to be, no matter how dysfunctional their family is, the children overwhelmingly say they want to live with their family. With the Family to Family approach we are able to keep kids in their own neighborhoods and communities by placing them with extended family or kin. The less disruption children encounter, the easier it will be for them to succeed in school and in life.”

The Family to Family model protects children by:

- ☐ Increasing family involvement and investment in developing safety and service plans for their children.
- ☐ Utilizing extended family, kin and community-based resources to support the family and monitor the safety of the children.
- ☐ Providing better information to DHS staff to ensure that all safety issues are addressed and back-up plans are available.
- ☐ Keeping the children in the community, their school and with siblings who know what is “normal” for the child and will be alert to any changes that may signal problems.
- ☐ Greater use of individualized services to meet the unique needs of a particular family.

For more information about the Family to Family initiative, visit the Michigan Department of Human Services Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs.

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